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Spywork Is Nothing New to Bush

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

George Bush had a dubious career in the cloak-and-dagger business before President Ford named him to be the nation's spy chief.

As the Republican National Committee chairman during the Watergate uproar, Bush did a little extracurricular spying on the Senate Watergate committee's respected chief investigator, Carmine Bellino.

The story is told in a Senate staff memo that was withheld from publication. Bush was eager to prove that the Democrats, too, had engaged in Watergate-style politics. So he tried to pin down a rumor that Bellino had used electronic equipment to snoop on the Republicans during the 1960 presidential election campaign.

To get the evidence, Bush relied upon an undercover operative named John Buckley—a Damon Runyon character whom the memo identifies “as a political spy with the code name ‘Fat Jack.’” Buckley had gained a measure of notoriety earlier for directing a snooping operation against Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine).

Fat Jack secured an affidavit, according to the memo, from a private eye named John Leon who happily attested that Bellino had eavesdropped on unsuspecting Republicans. Leon had made his reputation breaking down doors in domestic relations cases.

On July 24, 1973, with much fanfare,

Bush told a press conference that he had evidence of Bellino's electronic eavesdropping.

The Senate Watergate committee set up a special subcommittee, which wasted hundreds of hours investigating Bush's alleged findings. The subcommittee found the charges groundless.

The memo alleges that Bush ducked out on the Senate investigation. “He was not allowed by (the Republican Party counsel Jerris) Leonard to be questioned by staff members,” declares the memo.

Now the amiable Bush is awaiting Senate confirmation as the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Footnote: Leonard told us that Bush was unaware of Fat Jack's background. If the subcommittee had wanted Bush's testimony, Leonard added, it could have subpoenaed him. Bush insisted there was nothing political in his abortive effort to nail Bellino.

Colson Confidential—In the first book from President Nixon's inner circle, Charles W. Colson has given some fascinating insights into the Watergate era.

We published highlights of the Colson book, “Born Again,” in an earlier column. From our bootleg copy, here are a few more revelations:

—The triumphant Nixon could hardly bring himself to respond gracefully after Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) conceded the loss of the 1972 presidential election.

Nixon began “composing one draft after another of a telegram to send to his vanquished opponent . . .” recalls

Colson. “It was now close to 2 in the morning. McGovern had conceded hours earlier.

“By the rule of the game, Nixon's response was long overdue. Yet, as fast as the words rolled off his tongue, he would reject them.”

Finally Nixon, the master of dirty politics, turned to Colson and said: “How can I say something nice after he kept comparing me to Hitler?”

—Colson confesses ruefully that he “should have been wary of the spy business after an episode involving Watergate plumber E. Howard Hunt.

Hunt sought to pump a CIA operative about the possible involvement of President Kennedy in the 1963 Diem coup in South Vietnam. In his characteristic conspiratorial fashion, Hunt arranged a rendezvous in a vacant office that he had bugged. He planted the tape recorder under the couch and secured a bottle of Scotch so the CIA man “would talk more freely.”

“For two hours, the two men guzzled a fifth of the White House's best,” recounts Colson, “while I awaited the results in my office.” At last Hunt appeared, bleary-eyed, tie askew. He stammered sheepishly that the evening was a waste, he had no tape.

It turned out that Hunt had sat heavily on the couch over his tape recorder, “crushing the sensitive equipment.” Lacking the evidence to embarrass President Kennedy, Hunt later concocted it in a series of forged papers.

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